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XXVII. *Extract from the AKHLAK E NASERI, a work written by Nâser ud Dîn about the middle of the Thirteenth Century.\* Communicated by Col. MARK WILKS, Vice-President R.A.S.*

Read June 17, 1826.

#### PREFATORY NOTE.

My attention was recently drawn to the arguments of English divines, in answer to certain physiological publications tending to materialism, in consequence of the similarity, if not the identity of some of their reasonings, with those which I recollected to have seen in a Persian work, written by a Mohammedan in the thirteenth century. I accordingly sought for the passages, and the following translated extract from the "*Akhlâk e Nâseri*" is the result of the search. This striking similarity of reasoning is probably to be attributed to the actual derivation of each from one common source—the works of the Greek philosophers, with which the Persian author evinces an intimate acquaintance. An incidental notice is also observable in this extract of doctrines approaching those of the modern chemistry; and it is offered, not with any pretension of being worthy a place in the Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society, but for the mere purpose of being deposited with the work from which it is translated in the Library of the Society, as an indication, to those who have not perused it, of the character of the book.

London, 14th June 1826.

M. WILKS.

#### ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HUMAN SOUL,

WHICH IS LIKEWISE CALLED THE REASONING SPIRIT.

THE human soul is a simple essence; one of whose properties is to form rational conceptions within itself, directing and disposing of this sensitive body (*viz.* man) by means of certain powers and instruments.

This essence is not matter nor material, nor is it perceived by any of the senses. In order to establish this, it is necessary to demonstrate certain things, *viz.*

1st. The proof of the existence of the soul.

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\* It is said to have been written in the mountains of Persia, while the author was the forced guest of a successor of that *Hassan* from whom the English word *assassin* is supposed to be derived, and whose designation was *Sheikh ul Jebâl*, Lord of the Mountains, generally translated *old man of the mountain*. For the details of the singular abduction of Nâser ud Dîn from his quiet home at Bokhâra to this savage abode, see *Malcolm's History of Persia*, vol. i. p. 406.

2d. That it is an essence.

3d. That it is simple.

4th. That it is neither matter nor material.

5th. That it conceives by itself, and operates by means of organs or instruments.

6th. That it is not perceived by any of the senses.

Now for proof of the first, *viz.* the existence of the soul, no argument is necessary, its existence and identity being the most evident and obvious of all things to a rational man; inasmuch as, asleep or awake, sober or intoxicated, a man may forget all things except his own being. Now in what form shall any man produce an argument of his own being? for the nature of an argument is to be a medium which shall lead the prover to his proof. Now, if an argument be made use of to establish the existence of one's own being, the argument is a medium between a thing and itself; *ergo*, to argue the existence of self is absurd and impossible.

For proof of the second, *viz.* that it is an essence.

Every entity, except the Almighty, the self-existing, is either an essence or an accident: which may be thus illustrated. Every entity either exists of itself, or dependent on some other entity which exists independently: as whiteness and blackness, which are accidents or properties of a body; and the figure of a chair, which is dependent on the existence of the wood. For if the body did not exist, there could be no blackness; and if the wood, or some substitute for it, did not exist, there would be no figure of a chair. And such entities are called accidents. For were not this the case, they must have existed of themselves, without any dependence on other independent things; like body and wood, above exemplified, which are called essences.

This distinction being established, we affirm that the mind, or distinctive nature of man, cannot be an accident: for it is the nature of accident to be borne and received by some other thing, independent in itself, so as to admit of its bearing and receiving that accident; but the mind of man bears and receives ideas of external images and intellectual inferences, and both image and inference exist together in the mind, and are again obliterated, a property which is repugnant to accident.

The soul, therefore, cannot be an accident. Now it having been proved that every entity is either an essence or an accident, it follows that the soul is an essence: *q. e. d.*

Thirdly, that it is simple, is thus demonstrated.

Every thing that exists is either divisible or indivisible. What is indivisible, we here distinguish by the name of *simple* ; and what is divisible, by the name of *compound*. Now we say that the soul conceives itself to be *one* : for though it may affirm unity and its opposite with regard to other things, still it cannot apply number to itself, so as to admit of one being but a part of itself. Now if the soul were divisible, by dividing the subject the property would necessarily be divided also ; and unity, which is a property of the soul, would be divisible : which is impossible, for unity is indivisible. It therefore follows that either the soul is indivisible, or that it does not conceive itself to be one. Now the futility of the latter being evident, the former, which was to be demonstrated (*viz.* its being simple), is proved.

Fourthly, To shew that it is neither matter nor material, we say all matter is compound and divisible. The proof of which is, that place a material body, admitted to be such, between two other bodies which are in contact with it on each side, of necessity that which touches it on one side cannot touch it on the other, otherwise it would not prevent them from touching each other, and therefore could not be a body between them, but would be a part of those bodies. And as it is in contact at two separate parts with two separate things, it must itself be capable of parts. Such body being therefore compound, the qualities borne and received by it must likewise be compound : for if the subject be divided, its property is divided also. Of course, nothing that is matter or material can be simple. Now we have shewn that the soul is simple ; *ergo*, the soul can neither be matter nor material.

Again : no matter can receive a new figure or impression, until that which it possesses be removed. Thus a triangular body cannot become quadrangular until the triangular figure be removed : and a bit of wax, which has received the impression of a seal, cannot be conceived to possess another impression until the former one be removed : for if any part of the former impression still remain, they are both confused, and neither complete ; and this may be affirmed as a constant and universal property of matter. Now the nature of the soul is contrary to this : for how many images so ever are impressed upon it, whether from reflection or sensation, it receives them all in succession, without the necessity of removing one for the reception of the other, but the whole are completely and perfectly

imaged upon it. Nor can it ever happen, that from the number of images impressed it can be rendered incapable of receiving more; but, on the contrary, the greater the multitude of the images it contains, the greater is, in fact, its facility of acquiring more. And hence it is that the powers of the mind, and its capacity to receive instruction and knowledge, are increased in proportion to our attainments in science and literature. Now this property is opposite to the properties of matter: *ergo*, the soul is not matter.

Again: No sense can have a notice of any thing that is not an object of that sense. Thus vision has notice of no perception that is not visual; and hearing, of none abstracted from sound. Besides, no sense can be sensible of itself, or of its own sensitive organ: for example, the sense of vision neither sees the person seeing nor the eye; nor can any sense perceive its own errors. Thus the eye sees the sun, which is more than one hundred and sixty times larger than the earth, of the same size as the moon, and has no notice of this prodigious mistake; and thus of a tree on the margin of a lake, the cause of its apparent inversion in the water can never be perceived by the sense of vision. And the same holds good with regard to the errors of the other senses.

Now the soul perceives at the same instant the sensations of all the senses, and determines a specific sound to proceed from a specific object of vision, and that this object is the producer of that sound. In the same manner the soul comprehends the distinct power and the particular organ of each sense, distinguishes their natures, their frailties, and their errors; and of their notices discriminates which are right and which are wrong; and of consequence credits some and rejects others. But it is evident that it does not derive this kind of knowledge from the senses, for it is impossible to obtain from any sense that which it does not possess; nor can it have received from a sense a decision which belies that sense. It is, therefore, evident that the soul is distinct from the corporeal senses; that it is of a more noble nature, and of more perfect comprehension.

Fifthly, That it conceives by itself, and operates by means of instruments, is proved by its consciousness; for it cannot possibly be conscious by means of an organ or instrument, so as to admit of an instrument between itself and its existence. And it is on this principle that a thing which receives notices by means of an instrument, cannot comprehend by itself: for, as we have said, the instrument cannot be between it and

itself; nor can self, when made a medium, serve as an instrument to self. And this is the meaning of philosophers, in affirming, that with regard to reason, the agent, the thing acted on, and the act, are one and the same.

That the soul operates by means of instruments, is evident from its perceiving by means of the senses, and communicating motion by means of muscles, tendons, and nerves, the detail of which belongs to physiology.

Sixthly, That it is not perceived by any of the senses, is proved by the senses having no notice of any thing that is not matter nor material. Now the soul is neither matter nor material; *ergo*, it is not perceived by them.

This is what we proposed to discuss regarding the nature of the soul, which may suffice, as far as regards what we have already affirmed on that subject.

But it is moreover to be understood, that the human soul continues to exist after the dissolution of the body, and that death has no power to destroy it; but, on the contrary, that its annihilation is by no means possible.

\* \* \* \* \*

[A demonstration is here omitted, too much savouring of the subtilties of the old schools of the West, and quite unworthy of the subject. It rests chiefly on a play of words, regarding the terms existence *in esse*, and annihilation *in potentiâ*.]

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Moreover, any person, who minutely considers the properties of bodies, has an accurate knowledge of their dependence on the laws of composition and association, decomposition and disjunction, and is well versed in the whole science of the *world of corruption and decay* (chemistry), must know, that no body whatever becomes entirely destroyed: but that accidents, modes, composition, association, figures, and qualities, which subsist in a compound subject, may be changed, while the amount of matter shall still remain the same. For example, water may become air, and air fire, but the matter which receives these three separate appearances will still subsist: otherwise it could not be said that water became air, and air fire. For if an entity should be destroyed, and another produced, so that no sort of junction subsisted between them, it would be impossible to say that one entity became the other entity, or that such matter bore the property of having its forms extinguished and varied. Now, seeing that material substances are not susceptible of annihilation, uncompounded essences, which are purer

than base matter, will stand still higher touching the impossibility of annihilation.

The design of discussing this subject is, that every person who shall study this science may hold it certain, that the body is a mean or instrument to the soul, as tools and instruments are to mechanics and artisans: and not, as some have imagined, that the body is its subject or abode. For the soul is neither matter nor material, that it should be connected with subject or abode. Of course, the death of the body, with respect to the soul, is no more than the loss of the instrument with respect to the artisan.

And this position being amply and clearly established, in works of speculative philosophy, by undoubted proofs, what has been said may suffice.

But God is omniscient.